DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 438 529 CS 013 895

TITLE	How Reading Engages Children.
INSTITUTION	North Central Regional Educational Lab., Oak Brook, IL.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	21p.; Published quarterly.
CONTRACT	R168R50003; RJ96006301; R302A50007
AVAILABLE FROM	North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Editorial Offices: NCREL, 1900 Spring Road, Suite 300, Oak Brook, IL 60523-1480. Tel: 800-356-2735 (Toll Free); Web site: http://www.ncrel.org.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	NCREL's Learning Point; v1 n2 Spr-Sum 1999
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Developmental Stages; Elementary Secondary Education; Interviews; Mathematics Instruction; Reader Text Relationship; *Reading Achievement; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Strategies; Science Instruction

ABSTRACT

This theme issue of the NCREL's (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory's) "Learning Point" focuses on how reading engages children. The cover story article is an interview (Marianne Kroeger and Stephanie Blaser) with Mary Foertsch, from NCREL, on what types of innovative strategies teachers employ to help students become engaged readers. A special pull-out section offers 7 practical reading tips to share with parents, and "Checkpoints in Reading"--a grade-specific guide to help parents better understand their children's reading development at the kindergarten, third grade, sixth grade, ninth grade, and twelfth grade levels. (RS)

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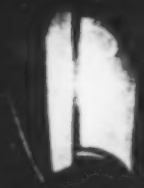
LEARNING POINT

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

Spring/Summer 1999

ED 438 529



How Reading Engages Children

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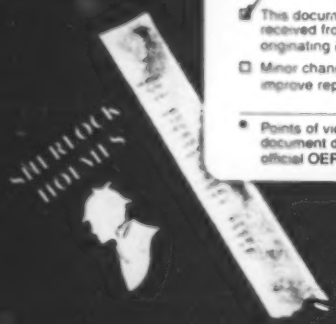

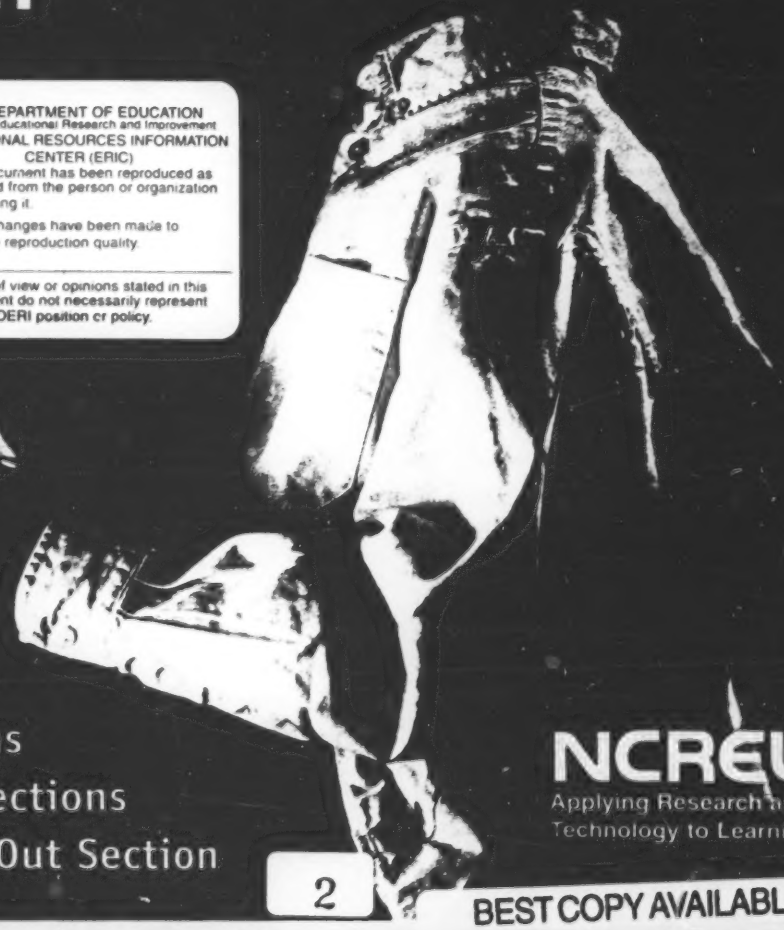

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- Doggone Good Lessons
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NCREL's
LEARNING POINT

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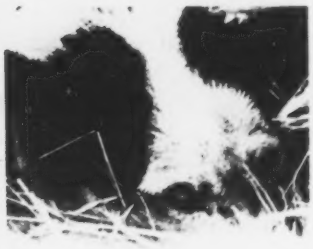

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Cover: Bill Burlingham
Winter Cover: Gary Ciccarelli

A Special Message from Jeri Nowakowski, Executive Director, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

As a high school English teacher, I probably took the importance of literacy development for granted. I was helping my students as they became engaged in what I hoped would be long-term relations with language and literature—not as they struggled with words on a page.

Today, though, teachers at all grade levels are coming to grips with the fact that teaching reading is part of their job. And we have prepared this issue of *NCREL's Learning Point* with that fact in mind as we strive to inform and perhaps inspire.

The focus of this issue, however, was not the only thing that made me think about the beginning of my education career as a teacher. Effective May 31, I stepped down as executive director of NCREL to begin another phase of my career, this time as senior vice president of curriculum development and evaluation with Voyager Expanded Learning® in Dallas, Texas. I leave NCREL in the extraordinarily capable hands of Gina Burkhardt, whom our Board has appointed as my successor, and her management team.

It has been a privilege and my pleasure for the past ten years to direct the lab that serves a region of some 26,000 schools and nearly one-fourth of our country's students. I thank all of you for your support.

P.S. Don't miss the Special Pull-Out Section on reading in the center pages. We encourage you to make copies for colleagues and parents.

This work was produced in whole or in part with funds from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, under contract number RJ96006301 and grant numbers R168R50003 and R302A50007. The content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of OERI or the Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the federal government.

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Dog gone

By Lenaya Raack

Walk into Shirley Skerhutt's fourth-grade classroom in early March and you just might understand how Dorothy felt landing in Oz. If instead of the central Wisconsin town of Stratford, you suspect you've been transported to frozen Alaska—complete with dog sled and, yes, those are dog booties—you're nearly right. If you could pry the would-be mushers away from their work, they'd be happy to explain that they're taking part—Stratford Elementary School-style—in the grueling Iditarod Sled Dog Race from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska.

The Iditarod was Skerhutt's way of getting her students actively involved in their own learning. What started as a reading class grounded in the Wisconsin Rural Reading Improvement Program six years ago takes the students on a journey that includes math, social studies, history, and science. This three-week unit runs the week before, during, and after the Iditarod.

Skerhutt begins the unit with the book *Stone Fox*. She follows with a videotape of the previous year's race, while her students munch on home-made puppy chow. (See recipe on p. 13.) Later, the students get a lesson on making sled dog booties. Then . . . the race is on.

"Each child selects a musher we can follow," says Skerhutt. "They each take one animal from the Alaskan

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Good Lessons

from the Alaskan Iditarod Sled Dog Race

diphtheria epidemic." And that's just the short list.

"They" is the operative word in this busy classroom. According to Skerhutt, "The children were the ones doing the work and answering their own questions and coming up with everything that they were interested in and wanted to find out." One of the first things they did was make a map of Alaska for the bulletin board. The names of the mushers were listed on the side, and each had a piece of string to mark the routes. Each day, says Skerhutt, if the musher was listed on the Web, the student would move the string along. Daily weather updates by students kept everyone advised of dropping temperatures and threatening snowstorms.

"We look everywhere [for information]," explains Skerhutt. "We go into the books. We go onto the Internet. I have a Web site that really helps the children. We read the newspapers and the trade books." But, she stresses, "They have to decide where is the best place to look. They have to make the choices."

Skerhutt has two computers in her room, which the students can access during free time. At least once a week, they visit the computer lab for an hour. All e-mailing is done through Skerhutt. Her students also use a VCR-TV to view last year's race, an encyclopedia on CD-ROM, and an overhead for presentations.

If there's one thing these fourth graders will take away from the race, it's that real life involves a lot of math. Skerhutt uses a sheet she calls Iditarod math. The students get a problem a day for 14 days, the length of time it usually takes for the last musher to finish. Like real mushers, Skerhutt's students have to figure out expenses for enrolling in the race, feeding the dogs, and getting supplies. "We see how we can afford to do that or how we can work around some things," she explains.

Skerhutt has found a great resource in the community and in families (including her own). Three years ago a parent brought in a sled dog, and each year a friend brings in his sled. Skerhutt's brother, who now lives and dog sleds in Alaska, sends pictures and updates. The town veterinarian is invited to visit the class and answer questions. What the

area and find all kinds of facts on it. They illustrate it and then they present it and share it with the rest of the class. They do several games. They learn Musher lingo. We get into the history: how the first run was a life-saving dash to Nome that carried serum for a

class finds out, says Skerhutt, is that "these animals are actually taken better care of than some of our children."

"Rural Reading [the predecessor of NCREL's Strategic Teaching and Reading Project] is the core of my whole unit," says Skerhutt. "It is teaching across the curriculum. It is using a variety of strategies. It is hands-on learning. It is total child involvement. STRP to me is education making sense. It's allowing the students to have ownership of their own learning and be responsible. It makes teaching fun."

Skerhutt sees herself as a supporter, guide, and helper. "I feel I am an activator. I am certainly a motivator. I am the one who makes sure that everything is out there and available and that the children know what is there." Teaching, she believes, is not only about the learning and technology, but bringing in what's happening in the real world.

Skerhutt advises teachers to "Go for it! If you are enthused and interested about something, you have the main ingredients right there. Give the children your idea. Let them help you come up with the whole internal part." To teachers concerned about their lack of experience with technology, Skerhutt says, "Get right in there and act like a fourth grader and learn with them." It worked for her. "Helping the children get out of their little and big problems has helped me more than any computer class I could have taken. They have a relaxed attitude and think they can conquer most anything. It rubs off on you."

Skerhutt gives a lot of credit to her principal, Barbara Gaulke. "Barb trusted me and allowed me the freedom to try these things. When you have someone like that behind you, do it. I felt successful before I even tried, regardless of how it came out."

Looking back at her own experience, Skerhutt says, "I think the hardest part [for teachers is letting] the children do the driving. You have to sit back and be the passenger. The children just rise to the occasion. They just love taking hold of things and doing it." One of the bonuses, says Skerhutt, is that "When you have children controlling their own learning and involved that deeply, you can eliminate most discipline problems."

So, four years later, what does Skerhutt think about her progress? "It was a dream I had," she muses. "The children are the ones who made it come true and made it a success." ●

connections

- **Videos:** *Beyond Courage, Alaska's Great Race,* and *Susan Butcher's Story*
- **Books:** *Stone Fox; Dog Song; Woodsong; The Bravest Dog Ever; Iditarod Classics; Race Across Alaska; Black Star, Bright Dawn;* and *Iditarod: The Great Race to Nome* (Books are available from *Iditarod.com*)
- **Web sites:** *www.Stratford.k12.wi.us* (Click on "Department," then scroll down to "Skerhutt"); *Iditarod.com; AlaskaOne.com;* and *SledDog.com*
- **E-mail:** *iditarod@iditarod.com; mushpuppy@aol.com* (relates to the 4th grade)
- To learn more about NCREL's Strategic Teaching and Reading Project, visit *www.ncrel.org/strp/Strp.htm*

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The Sky's the Limit

The consortium also offers a variety of Internet sites and electronic support tools, some of which appear below. Check them out today!

- **MSC** home page: *www.ncrel.org/msc*
- **Gateway**, now under development, is a collaborative effort of the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning; NCREL; and MSC that allows teachers to locate resources categorized according to gateway concepts within academic content areas. *www.ncrel.org/msc/gateway/index.htm*
- **Pathways to School Improvement,** which was co-developed with NCREL, features special sections pertaining to math, science, and professional development. *www.ncrel.org/pathways.htm*
- **Learning Through Technology: A Planning and Implementation Guide**—a co-development effort involving NCREL, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the National Center for Supercomputer Application—helps educators and community members develop a comprehensive learning and technology plan. *www.ncrel.org/tandl/plan1.htm*
- **A customized Internet search engine** for math and science teachers is maintained in collaboration with NCREL's North Central Regional Technology in Education Consortium. *www.ncrel.org/Excite/AT-ncrtec_findquery.html*

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cover story

How Reading Engages Children

By Marianne Kroeger & Stephanie Blaser

Nick LOVES to read. Lately, he's been devouring mystery books thanks to his teacher, Ms. Cruz. It all started when she read a few whodunit stories to the class. In particular, Nick and his classmates enjoyed predicting how each mystery would be solved. When the children started reading on their own, Ms. Cruz focused on helping them learn to decode certain types of suffixes. And now, Nick and his fellow classroom sleuths are writing their own—soon-to-be-ink-jet-printed—school mystery!

Nick and his classmates are not alone. All around the country teachers are implementing an increasing number of effective strategies that enhance student reading. In the following interview, Mary Foertsch, coordinator of the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum at NCREL, shares her thoughts on some of the latest issues and research on reading that should be of particular interest to classroom teachers.

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How can parents influence children's reading achievement?

• READ TO THEIR CHILDREN.

The best thing parents can do to get their young children interested in reading is to read to them often. It is important when children are being read to that they sit next to or on the lap of the adult. The child can then see the text and the book and note how the reader moves his or her eyes and turns the pages. This closeness and caring promote the child's healthy development and preparation for learning. They also reinforce the idea that reading is enjoyable.

• USE PICTURE BOOKS.

Parents whose own literacy skills may be weak can use picture books. The pictures help children make up stories, talk about the meaning of the illustrations, or tell how the illustrations relate to their own lives. Parents or other adults can keep the stories moving by asking questions or prompting the children. Today, many books for both children and adults are available in "read-along" versions and audiotapes.

• HAVE THEIR CHILDREN READ TO THEM.

It's a good idea to have children read to their parents. A parent and child can also take turns reading to one another. Reading aloud to an audience—whether it be parents, grandparents, older siblings, other relatives, or friends—is one of the best ways for children to practice reading skills.

• READ MORE THEMSELVES.

Parents should read often, whether it's books, magazines, bills, grocery lists, or assembly instructions. When children see their parents read, they want to read, too. The more parents can involve children in daily reading activities, the more interested in reading children become. Parents should urge their children to make up their own grocery lists or help assemble a toy following written directions.

• TALK WITH AND LISTEN TO THEIR CHILDREN.

Talking with children and listening attentively as they express themselves are important in children's language development. During conversations, even very young children learn that words represent ideas and objects. For all children, conversations develop vocabulary. A recent survey reports that parents talk to their children, on average, just a few minutes every day, and even then they are usually giving orders. Parents who talk with their children about their lives and the world around them help children place ideas in context and figure out meaning from events. Children need these kinds of skills to read well.

• TALK ABOUT BOOKS.

Parents should talk with children about books. That sends a signal to the children that reading is important. Parents who discuss books and ask probing questions draw children more deeply into the books and model an attitude of curiosity and a desire to learn.

• PRAISE THEIR CHILDREN.

Parents of good readers praise their children's reading accomplishments. They do not punish poor readers. Punishing children makes them develop negative attitudes about reading and can lower reading achievement.

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Checkpoints in Reading

To help parents better understand their children's reading development, NEKIA Communications has developed these checkpoints in reading. Not intended as a specific recipe for every child, this list highlights some of the reading skills children naturally develop. Teachers and parents can refer to them as general guidelines for observing, discussing, and evaluating children's reading progress.

KINDERGARTEN

The child knows that print carries meaning by:
- ✔ Turning pages in a storybook to find out what happens next.
- ✔ Writing (scribbling or using invented spelling) to communicate a message.
- ✔ Using the language and voice of stories when narrating his/her own stories.
- ✔ Dictating stories.

The child knows what written language looks like by:
- ✔ Recognizing that words are made up of combinations of letters.
- ✔ Identifying specific letters in unfamiliar words.
- ✔ Writing with "mock" letters or features of real letters.

The child can identify and name letters of the alphabet by:
- ✔ Saying the alphabet.
- ✔ Pointing out letters of the alphabet in a text.

The child knows that letters are associated with sounds by:
- ✔ Pointing while reading or being read to.
- ✔ Spelling words phonetically, relating letters to the sounds they hear in the word.

The child knows the sounds that letters make by:
- ✔ Naming objects in a room that begin with the same letter.
- ✔ Pointing to words in a text that begin with the same letter.
- ✔ Picking out words that rhyme.
- ✔ Trying to sound out new or unfamiliar words while reading out loud.

The child knows using words can serve various purposes by:
- ✔ Pointing to signs for specific places, such as a play area, restaurant, or store.
- ✔ Writing for different purposes, such as a pretend grocery list or a thank-you letter.

The child knows how books work by:
- ✔ Holding the book right side up.
- ✔ Reading from left to right and top to bottom.
- ✔ Beginning reading at the front of the book and moving sequentially to the back.

The child can link text to previous learning by:
- ✔ Talking about what he or she has read.
- ✔ Comparing events or characters in two stories.

The child understands what he or she reads by:
- ✔ Talking about the story.
- ✔ Telling how something in the story is like something in his/her life or experience.

The child enjoys reading by:
- ✔ Wanting to be read to.
- ✔ Wanting to get books from the library to read.
- ✔ Showing off new reading skills.

THIRD GRADE

The child improves his/her comprehension while reading a variety of simple texts by:
- ✔ Thinking about what he/she already knows.
- ✔ Asking and answering questions while reading.
- ✔ Creating and changing mental pictures.
- ✔ Rereading when confused.

The child applies word-analysis skills while reading by:
- ✔ Using phonics and simple context clues to figure out unknown words.
- ✔ Using word parts (e.g., root words, prefixes, suffixes, similar words) to figure out unfamiliar words.

(continued on next page)

The child understands elements of literature (e.g., author, main character, setting) by:
- ✔ Coming to a conclusion about events, characters, and settings in stories.
- ✔ Comparing settings, characters, and events in different stories.
- ✔ Explaining reasons for characters acting the way they do in stories.

The child understands the characteristics of various genres (e.g., fables, realistic fiction, folk tales, poetry, humorous stories) by:
- ✔ Explaining the differences among simple genres.
- ✔ Writing stories that contain the characteristics of a selected genre.

The child uses correct and appropriate conventions of language when responding to written text by:
- ✔ Spelling common words correctly.
- ✔ Using capital letters, commas, and end punctuation correctly.
- ✔ Writing legibly in print and/or cursive.
- ✔ Using appropriate and varied word choice.
- ✔ Using complete sentences.

SIXTH GRADE

The student uses strategies to figure out unfamiliar words by:
- ✔ Sounding out new words when reading aloud.
- ✔ Using context clues, such as looking at the whole sentence and surrounding sentences.
- ✔ Using phonics clues and his/her knowledge of word origins and derivations.
- ✔ Using reference materials and/or expert sources.

The student can read a variety of texts by:
- ✔ Reading social studies, math, and science textbooks.
- ✔ Reading the local newspaper and popular magazines.

The student can summarize information from what he/she has read by:
- ✔ Saying what a book, story, or article is about in one or two sentences.
- ✔ Picking out the main idea and supporting details.

The student demonstrates an ability to read critically by:
- ✔ Explaining what happened in a book or story, what makes the main characters tick, and the author's reason for writing it.
- ✔ Using information in a book to draw conclusions about its characters, events, or settings.

The student continues to enjoy reading by:
- ✔ Checking out books from the school or local library to read for fun.
- ✔ Reading magazines and newspapers out of interest.

The student uses strategies while reading a variety of texts (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, poetry, textbooks) that directly improve his/her comprehension by:
- ✔ Connecting new information to previous learning or real-life experiences.
- ✔ Identifying questions to be asked and answered while reading.
- ✔ Creating and changing mental pictures to increase comprehension of the text.
- ✔ Drawing conclusions and making inferences based on explicit and implicit information.
- ✔ Rereading or discussing a confusing part with others to clear up any confusion.

The student demonstrates understanding of how the elements and characteristics of literature interact by:
- ✔ Distinguishing whether an author is writing in the first or third person.
- ✔ Explaining how the actions of the characters, the setting, and plot development support the storyline.
- ✔ Discussing any recurring themes that may exist in one piece of literature.

The student uses correct and appropriate conventions of language when responding to written text by:
- ✔ Having no significant errors in spelling and grammar.
- ✔ Writing legibly in cursive.
- ✔ Using a variety of sentence structures and vocabulary that facilitate understanding and enhance his/her message.
- ✔ Providing significant detail to his/her response to support the main ideas being presented.

Checkpoints in Reading

NINTH GRADE

The student can use decoding and comprehension strategies to get information from a wide range of materials by:
- ✔ Reading and understanding school textbooks.
- ✔ Reading and understanding classic novels, like *Great Expectations*.
- ✔ Reading and understanding general audience magazines, like *Time* and *Newsweek*.

The student demonstrates reading comprehension by:
- ✔ Explaining a character's traits, motivation, and actions in the story.
- ✔ Explaining the theme, message, or moral of a book or story.
- ✔ Explaining how the author's style and word choice affect the reader and add to the story.
- ✔ Comparing one book's style and message to another's.

The student can summarize and combine information from different sources by:
- ✔ Reading and following bus schedules and maps.
- ✔ Making graphs from information, like test grades or daily high and low temperatures.

The student can find information in print and through electronic references by:
- ✔ Looking up information in encyclopedias, both print and CD-ROM.
- ✔ Using the online card catalog at the library to find books.
- ✔ Using the *Reader's Guide to Periodicals* to find information.

The student continues to enjoy reading by:
- ✔ Checking out books from school or the local library to read for fun.
- ✔ Reading magazines and newspapers out of interest.

TWELTH GRADE

The student reads to build knowledge and skills by:
- ✔ Reading a wide variety of texts on a wide variety of subjects.
- ✔ Conducting research on issues of personal interest.
- ✔ Making connections between new information and his/her own personal experiences.

The student reads with understanding and fluency by:
- ✔ Summarizing a text.
- ✔ Converting or manipulating the information to fit other learning situations.
- ✔ Drawing conclusions from evidence in the text.
- ✔ Identifying and analyzing new terminology.

The student reads to understand and solve problems by:
- ✔ Discovering new, existing, or different relationships among texts and across disciplines.
- ✔ Organizing information to understand it.
- ✔ Using inductive and deductive reasoning.

The student analyzes what has been read and judges the merit of the information by:
- ✔ Identifying inconsistencies in the text, examples of biases in writing, and support for arguments.
- ✔ Evaluating texts for purpose, structure, content, detail, and effect.
- ✔ Identifying literary devices used and their effects on the message.
- ✔ Identifying themes and tying them into the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of the text.

The student demonstrates aesthetic appreciation of reading materials by:
- ✔ Commenting on the language, including the rhythm and rhyme of the text.
- ✔ Explaining why he/she likes characters, interesting situations, or plots.
- ✔ Critically evaluating plot, themes, character traits, motives, and the effect of the setting on the characters and the plot.
- ✔ Using his/her imagination to create personal texts in the same genre.

(continued from page 8)

NCREL's Learning Point: Let's start with the reading wars: phonics versus whole language. What IS the best way to teach children how to read?

Mary Foertsch: The best approach to teaching children to read has been controversial for decades. We know from research and best practices that children who succeed in reading are in classrooms that display a wide range of possible approaches to instruction.

There is also evidence that explicit instruction that directs children's attention to the sound structure of oral language and to the connection between phonemes [the sound units that make a difference to word meaning] and spelling provides children with strategies for understanding unfamiliar printed words. The intensity of the instruction should be matched to children's needs. Children who lack these strategies and understandings should be helped to acquire them.

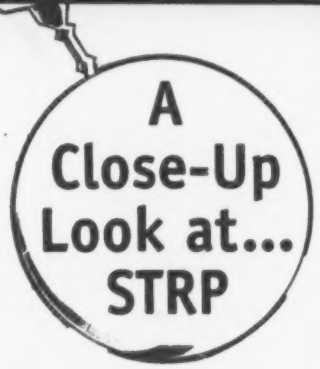
I would go so far as to say that first-grade instruction should be designed to provide explicit instruction and practice in phonemic awareness; familiarity with letter-sound correspondences; common conventions and their use in identifying printed words; "sight" recognition of frequent words; and independent reading, including reading aloud.

NLP: So how does a teacher know what each student needs—especially when classes are large and diverse? It must call for more than just standardized tests, right?

Mary Foertsch: We all know that learning and teaching are processes that are too dynamic to rely upon single measures of anything—especially early reading. Formal (standardized) tests of early literacy test the component parts of reading in isolation from any natural, real reading context to see if they have been mastered.

These formal measures of early literacy provide schools with an added attraction that is nurtured, if not driven, by the accountability movements in educational policy. They give the illusion of being objective. The irony here is that tests are no more objective than teacher judgment; they simply move the subjectivity one level further away from the students—to those who construct the tests in the first place.

More than better formal tests, teachers need more knowledge and skill in reading instruction in order to develop the expertise to construct measures that match their needs and their students' needs. It's a given that effective instruction consists of responding to children's needs while building on their strengths. It necessarily depends on a sensitive and ongoing effort to monitor student progress. In order to accomplish this, classroom teachers need an inventory of assessment tools and strategies for day-to-day use to determine whether or not children are reaching curricular goals in a timely fashion, to identify children in need of extra help, to specify the nature of their needs, and to



NCREL's *Strategic Teaching and Reading Project* (STRP) is a research-based instructional improvement and staff development project that measurably improves student reading comprehension. STRP works with any existing curriculum and instructional materials, adapts to local and state learning objectives, is suitable for all classrooms (K-12), and maintains the creativity and instructional freedom of teachers. And teachers don't have to be reading specialists to help their students become strategic readers and learners. The comprehension strategies at the core of STRP are learning strategies—suitable, effective, and necessary for all content areas.

Training and follow-up service is available to individual schools and districts on a fee basis. For more information on implementation, visit *www.ncrel.org/strp/Strp.htm*. For content background, search for "strategic teaching and reading project" on NCREL's *Pathways to School Improvement site at www.ncrel.org/pathways.htm.*

Now in development is an online course, based on STRP, that provides educators with current research on reading strategy instruction, models and examples and strategy applications in the classroom, and concrete suggestions for assessment and evaluation in an asynchronous learning environment. Intended for schools seeking a professional development plan that uses reading as a framework, the course presents five reading strategies that are reorganized from the original STRP content. The original topics of Metacognition, Text Structure, Word Meaning, Inferencing, and Prior Knowledge have been changed to Monitoring Comprehension, Identifying Important Information in Text, Developing Vocabulary, Drawing Inferences and Using Prior Knowledge, and Summarizing. NCREL will begin pilot testing the first module of the course this summer.

Also in development are two enhancements to STRP. One is a training and curriculum component that helps kindergarten and primary-grade teachers and administrators address their special needs and responsibilities as teachers of early literacy. The other consists of content area reading units that incorporate principles and strategies of STRP supported by bilingual instruction and varying levels of technology.

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recognize when difficulties have been adequately overcome. That's probably more than you ever wanted to know about reading assessment!

NLP: How does a teacher address the different needs of all students in a class?

Mary Foertsch: Approaches to early reading instruction do make a difference for the development and outcomes of the reading skills, in particular, among first- and second-grade students who are at risk for failure. However, not all approaches are equal. The amount of improvement in word-reading skill seems to be associated with the degree of explicitness in the instructional method. The embedded phonics approach, in which sound-spelling patterns are systematically embedded in connected texts, has been shown to be more effective for disadvantaged students than the whole-language approach. In this approach, teachers begin a lesson by presenting a word containing the target spelling pattern and, by deleting the word's initial consonant or consonant cluster, directing attention to the spelling and sound of its remainder.

By substituting different beginning sounds and spellings, students begin to generalize the pattern to new words. The patterns are then practiced by children in context through repeated readings of trade books containing these patterns as well as writing activities.

NLP: Can you give a specific example of what this kind of approach looks like in the classroom?

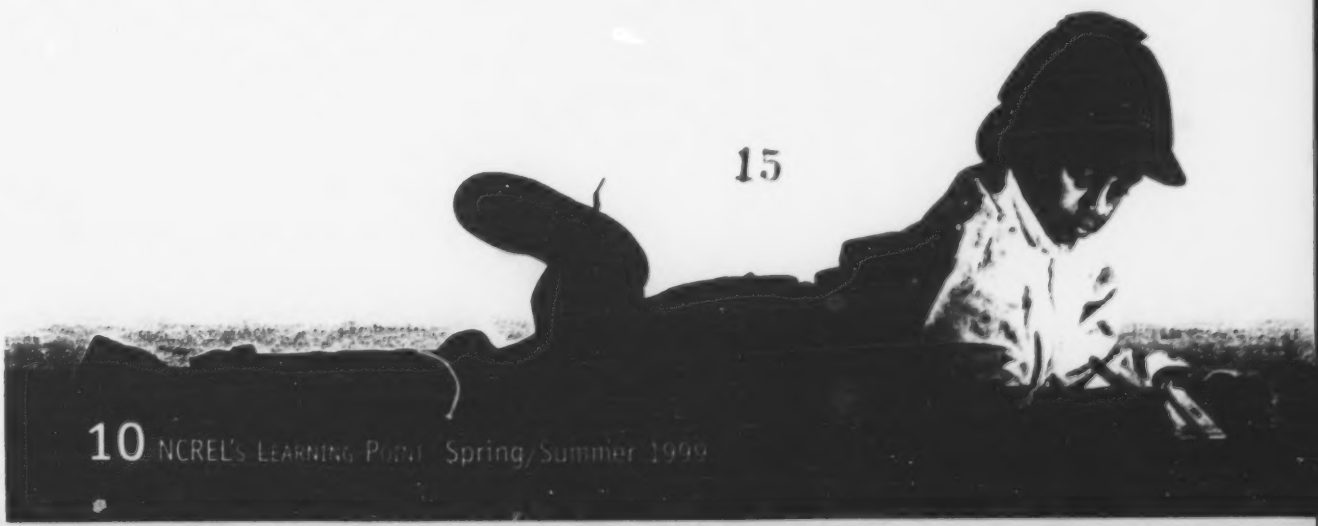
Mary Foertsch: I'll try. Our teacher, Mr. Y, starts the lesson with a morning message, using yesterday's target spelling pattern, *-at*. He writes on the board, "i sat on the floor together today". Students edit the message by changing "together" to "alone" and "today" to "yesterday." With help from the Mr. Y, they also capitalize the initial "I" and add a period at the end of the sentence.

Mr. Y's target spelling pattern for the day is *-an*. He introduces this pattern through shared reading of a big book in which he points out each word while reading. When he comes to a word containing the target pattern, he stops reading the story and writes the word on the board. He asks the children which word family the word belongs to. Then Mr. Y asks what other words belong to the same word family. Children spell these words as he writes them on the board.

After the book reading, students return to their seats and glue small strips of paper with the target pattern, *-an*, to a large sheet of construction paper. Students put various letters of the alphabet in front of the *-an* to make different words. While students are doing this, Mr. Y works with a small group of students by writing yesterday's spelling pattern on a board. He elicits words in this pattern and asks students to use them in a sentence. The children reread yesterday's story with the teacher. Then Mr. Y gives them materials to write additional words with the *-an* pattern while he helps one student with a problem.

NLP: What other strategies can teachers use to ensure that students become proficient readers?

Mary Foertsch: Once students have phonemic awareness nailed down and begin to



move on to issues of comprehension, the strategies identified through NCREL's Strategic Teaching and Reading Project are critical to later success, particularly when students move from literature-based instruction to include more informational types of texts. These strategies include (a) activating prior knowledge before, during, and after reading; (b) inferencing, which is the use of reasoning skills to formulate conclusions from something that is known or assumed to be true; (c) using metacognitive strategies, which, broadly defined, means taking charge of your own learning and thinking about how you learn; (d) understanding word meaning; and (e) knowing about text structure. Text structure refers to the textual features of learning materials that influence comprehension and memory. Students need to know how to recognize differences between the two basic types of text structures (narrative and expository). Students also need to practice self-assessment during reading by asking questions, such as "How does this relate to what I just read?" and "What is this character saying about the other character?" These strategies really are important.

NLP: Do some strategies work better at different grade levels or abilities?

Mary Foertsch: Yes. Some strategies assume students already have a foundation for learning. For example, recognizing text structure assumes a student's ability to access text, which certainly wouldn't be true of very young readers. This strategy becomes more useful at the middle school and high school levels and, to a lesser extent, in later elementary grades. Teachers don't even have room to grapple with it at the primary level, because

(continued on page 14)

Mary Foertsch

Want to learn more?

Check out these resources.

- Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA): *www.ciera.org*
- Children, Youth, and Family Consortium: *www.cyfc.umn.edu/*
- ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education: *http://eric/eece.org/*
- National Center for Early Development and Learning: *www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/*
- National Center for Family Literacy: *www.famlit.org/*
- National Council of Teachers of English: *www.ncte.org*
- National Research and Development Center on English Learning and Achievement (CELA): *http://cela.albany.edu/*
- State Literacy Resource Centers: *www.ed.gov/Programs/bastmp/SLRC.htm*
- *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, by Katherine Snow (Ed.), 1999.
- *Ready*Set*Read for Families*, U.S. Department of Education, America Reads Challenge, 1997.
- *Helping Your Child Learn to Read*, U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1993.
- *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children*, by M. J. Adams, B. R. Foorman, I. Lundberg, and T. D. Beeler, 1998. (Available from Paul H. Brooks Publishing Co., 800-638-3775.)
- *Classrooms That Work: They All Read and Write*, by P. Cunningham and R. Allington, 1999.

NCREL NEWS &

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

EARLY CHILDHOOD NEWS

Two new early childhood documents are now available on the *Pathways to School Improvement* Internet server:

Promoting Children's Readiness to Learn looks at how educators can promote learning for all children by providing an environment that acknowledges children's diverse backgrounds, helps students move into the next instructional level, and provides community support when necessary. Such provisions support each child's readiness to learn as well as each school's readiness to educate young children.

Meeting the Diverse Needs of Young Children reflects on the challenges and opportunities facing educators because of the diversity of young children in today's classrooms. With knowledge of effective practices and the support of administrators, colleagues, families, and the community, teachers can create classrooms that are responsive to the diverse needs of all children.

Be sure to check these and other new items out on your next trip to *www.ncrel.org/pathways.htm*

The U.S. Department of Education is pleased to announce the

1999 Regional Conferences on Improving America's Schools

Oct. 6-8	**Tampa, FL**
Nov. 8-10	**Salt Lake City, UT**
Dec. 15-17	**Chicago, IL**

Participants will get information on program updates, new initiatives, fundin opportunities, comprehensive school reform, and much more!

For information, call (800) 203-5494 or visit the conference Web site at *www.ncbe.gwu.edu/iasconferences*

Safety First

Visit NCREL's new Web site on safe learning communities at www.ncrel.org/sos today. The site contains links to research on school violence and safety; resources for schools, parents, students, and community members; and information on organizations concerned with school and youth violence.

And mark your calendar for a three-part videoconference series, "Lessons Learned: Breaking the Cycle of Violence II." For information on downlinking this program or purchasing copies, contact Nancy Silas Shin, 812-337-7703.

All proceeds go to the HOPE Foundation.

Online Newsletter for Tech-Savvy Educators

Every month, this free electronic newsletter will bring the latest information on educational technology right to your e-mailbox—from new software products and tools to current events, plus links to useful Web sites. The newsletter is published by the North Central Regional Technology in Education Consortium.

To subscribe, address your e-mail message to: *ncrtecnews@ncrelsgi.ncrel.org*

Type the following in the subject line of your message: NCRTEC Newsletter.

Subscrib Today!

NOTES

Read a Good Book Today?

Shirley's Puppy Chow

1/2 cup margarine
12 oz. semi-sweet chocolate chips
1 cup chunky peanut butter
12 oz. Crispix cereal
2 cups powdered sugar

Microwave the margarine until melted. Add chocolate chips and peanut butter (heat until just melted). Stir in cereal and add in powdered sugar. Place the mixture in a plastic bag and shake it to coat it well. Lay it all out on a cookie sheet or paper towel until cooled and then put into an airtight container.

(See related article on page 4.)

Press Release

Please Post Immediately

The Early Childhood Research Institute on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) invites educators to visit its Web site (*http://clas.uiuc.edu*). Each month, the site will feature a different literature review on an issue of diversity in early childhood/special education. Visitors can send feedback on the papers electronically and read other professionals' comments. CLAS plans to publish these papers in a book.

Some entries are full-text; some are in other languages; and some contain reviews. The materials concern children from birth to five years old from a variety of backgrounds and seem to be effective across cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Included are:

- Information packets and brochures for parents
- Child Find materials
- Child and family assessment tools
- Resources or curriculum materials

Also included are annotated bibliographies, links to Internet sites, and a resource library.

CLAS is a collaborative effort of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the Council for Exceptional Children.

CLAS also invites people to submit materials for posting to the site.

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(continued from page 11)
there are so many other decoding strategies that need to be taught.

NLP: Are elementary teachers—especially new ones—prepared to teach reading in this way? How about those who teach at the middle and high school levels?

Mary Foertsch: Many beginning teachers do not have sufficient education to enable them to help all students become successful readers. Course work in the teaching of reading tends to be insufficient to provide beginning teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills that will enable them to help all students read.

A major factor is that little to no time is allocated for preparing middle and high school teachers to teach reading. A second factor is that teacher training programs are highly variable in addressing the foundations of reading.

> "...learning and teaching are processes that are too dynamic to rely upon single measures of anything—especially early reading."

Teachers need to have a strong knowledge base about reading. It is essential that teachers at all grade levels understand the course of literacy development and the role of instruction.

Preservice teachers should know about such areas as comprehension and its dependence on other aspects of reading and on language skills; procedures for ongoing in-classroom assessment of students' reading ability; and information on the design features and requirements of a reading curriculum, to name only a few.

NLP: What role does writing play in reading comprehension?

Mary Foertsch: Writing goes hand-in-hand with reading comprehension. It actually facilitates capturing thoughts and helping children explain what they think they are reading. It is critical from a developmental perspective that young children have opportunities to write—even short sentences that may not look like real sentences. We need to have students write down what they think they just read in a book. Students may use inventive writing that looks like nonsense, but when they are asked what it means, they have a full explanation.

NLP: There is a lot of discussion about technology and its role in enhancing instructional practice and engaged student learning. Is there a role it can play in reading instruction?

Mary Foertsch: We are finding that technology can play a very important role. There are some good drill-and-practice software programs out there right now for beginning readers. However, they should not be used without adult supervision, which is too often the case. There also is a lot of really great software for writing. It is a good idea to get kids started as early as possible. While these programs probably are not going to make the difference between success or failure in reading, they give students an opportunity to practice and review what they have learned. I think technology plays an important role in this way.

NLP: What do you think is the most important thing for reading teachers to keep in mind?

Mary Foertsch: Don't push kids beyond where they are able to go, but do not fail to challenge them. This idea is important. It is one that gets lost in the shuffle with all the other debates going on. The more widely kids can read, the better off they are going to be. ●

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CIERA Announces...

Every Child a Reader

"Applying Reading Research in the Classroom"

This innovative series of eight 6-page pamphlets summarizes the state of current research in reading education. Written in clear, concise language for teachers and teacher educators, the series includes such topics as oral language, phonics, fluency, and reading strategies. All eight topics are available in a self-closing folder for just $10.

Useful in both preservice and inservice settings, **Every Child a Reader** is particularly helpful to new teachers, giving them access to current research and practical activities to implement in their classrooms. Each pamphlet features:

- Tables of developmental accomplishments, allowing teachers and families to follow children's development in relation to the overall goal of independent, third-grade reading
- Research-based classroom activities
- References to related articles from *The Reading Teacher*, a publication of the International Reading Association*
- Activities designed specifically for English-language learners and struggling readers
- Full references to the original research

*These articles are compiled in a volume called **Every Child a Reader: Companion Readings**, and are available from CIERA, courtesy of IRA.

About CIERA

The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement is the national center for research on early reading and represents a consortium of educators in five universities and numerous schools and districts across the U.S. Authors of the **Every Child a Reader** series are Elfrieda H. Hiebert, CIERA/University of Michigan; P. David Pearson, CIERA/Michigan State University; Barbara M. Taylor, CIERA/University of Minnesota; Virginia Richardson, CIERA/University of Michigan; and Scott G. Paris, CIERA/University of Michigan. To learn more about CIERA, visit its Web site at *www.ciera.org*.

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NCREL's
LEARNING POINT

A quarterly publication of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

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NCREL's Learning Point is produced in cooperation with A+ Media, Inc. (847-205-3071).

Printed on recycled paper

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The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping educators—and the students they serve—reach their full potential. For over 13 years, NCREL has provided research-based resources and professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, and policymakers throughout the Midwest. Supported by the U.S. Department of Education, NCREL serves a seven-state region, including Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. NCREL is located in Oak Brook, Illinois, approximately 16 miles west of Chicago.

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